

Perceptions of Parents on the Practice of Private Tuition in Public Learning Institutions in Kenya

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Abstract

The practice of private tuition outside normal class hours is a phenomenon which has prevailed in Kenyan basic learning institutions despite the repeated ban by the government. The purpose of the study was to establish parental perceptions on extra tuition in public schools in Kenya. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. A total of 40 parents purposively selected from a random sample of 10 schools in Makueni County participated in the study. Self administered structured questionnaires were used to collect data and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used to analyze the data. All the null hypotheses were tested using the t-test for independence of means at a 0.05 level of significance. The analyzed data was presented in form of frequency tables. The study found that parents had a favorable perception towards private tuition. Among the reasons for this favorable attitude towards the practice was that; private tuition helped towards improvement of children's mean grade, improves overall school performance, facilitates syllabus coverage, leads to improvement on academic performance and in increasing knowledge in various subjects among others. Further, the findings revealed that gender of the parents does not influence their perceptions towards the practice of extra tuition ($p>0.05$). Similarly, the views of parents whose children participated in private tuition and those whose children did not participate in the practice were homogeneous and hence; not statistically significant ($p>0.05$). The study recommends that the Government of Kenya should not outlaw the practice; instead, the practice should be encouraged and taxed as is the case in Israel and Australia where in each, case, private tuition contributes to the revenues of these countries. Alternatively, the government has to overhaul the entire structure of education that places high premiums on examination grades for the practice to be controlled and to ensure children have time for leisure.

Keywords: parents, perception, private tuition, public learning institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Investment in education plays a significant role in a country's development through empowerment of people to improve their wellbeing and participate actively in nation building (Nafula, 2002). Education has been recognized as a central element in national development. UNESCO (1960) recognizes access to education and possession of basic education as a basic human right (Article 26).

Many children throughout the world will regularly proceed for some form of private tutoring after their regular school lessons. Some tutoring is done within the same institution by the same regular teachers, while others are tutored by people who are not their regular teachers in different premises that could be the tutors home, child's home or hired premises. Stevenson and Baker (1992) refer to private tutoring as a set of educational activities outside formal schooling that are designed to improve students chances of successfully moving through the school system. Tansel and Bircan (2006) define private tutoring as education outside the formal schooling system where the tutors teach particular subjects for financial gain. In many countries, school teachers use private tuition time to finish or provide additional instruction on the national curriculum (Brehm & Silova, 2014).

In most countries poor performance of students is given as the main reason for the growing demand for private tuition. Education authorities in the USA, South Africa, England and Australia have introduced schemes to support the provision of private or extra tuition as a supplement to publicly funded school education. In Australia for example, the national government has introduced vouchers to fund extra tuition for students who fall behind national achievement benchmarks, thus subsidizing private tutoring in providing remedial education. In Israel there are special tutoring programmes for underperforming high school students in order to enable them get matriculation certificates (Dang & Rogers, 2008; Watson, 2008 & Bray, 2009).

Parents and teachers argue that private tuition enables learners to access additional attention, ensures improved learning styles, improved performance, personalized relationship, and involvement of parents as they keep track of the performance of their children (Makworo, 2012). In Kenya, the phenomena of private tuition started after 1985 when the 8-4-4 system of education was introduced to replace the then 7-4-2-3 system (Wanyama & Njeru, 2004). With the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in Kenya, the subject matter that used to be completed in six years secondary schooling was to be covered in four years. The situation compelled parents to send their children to private schools to be taught privately during the holidays and weekends in addition to the government term schedules (Wamaihu, 1989). The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) results of 1989 released by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) in February

1990 showed that 58% of the candidates who sat for the examinations scored below average. This was an indication that the candidates were inadequately prepared for the national examinations. As a result, many parents hired private tutors for their children outside school hours.

The report of the Task Force on Students Discipline and Unrests in Secondary schools in Kenya (Nzomo, Kariuki & Guanti, 2001), found out that most households were unable to afford to pay school fees and buy learning materials for their children due to poverty. Therefore it was argued that extra expenses for private tuition made it difficult for households to educate their children. The report recommended that the Ministry of Education (MOE) withdraw private tuition for all primary and secondary school students. This was attributed to the high cost of education worsened by the burden of cost sharing which had a negative impact on access, equity, and quality of education in Kenya. Following this recommendation, the MOE in Kenya banned private tuition in 1988 and repeated the same in 2008 in a circular, MOE/GEN/G1/11/4 signed by the then Permanent Secretary in that ministry. The Kenyan Basic Education Act (2013), section 37(1) states that no pupil shall be subjected to holiday tuition and that any person who contravenes the law is liable to a fine not exceeding KSh100, 000 or one-year imprisonment or both. Conducting private tuition in private premises is also a crime, according to the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) code of conduct and ethics.

Extra tuition constitutes a serious financial burden to the low income households yet strong support for the practice comes from parents. Ho Nga Ho (2010), notes that the working class and middle class families in Hong Kong employ private tutors as an educational investment. The low class families particularly regard private tutoring as a way to attain upward social mobility, while the middle class families wish to remain as social elites. The study further confirms that more than 50% of both low-income and middle-income households in Hong Kong spent 1.1-5.0% of their monthly household income on extra tutoring fees. Apart from economic considerations, parents in Hong Kong hire private tutors to take care of the individual needs of students. Therefore, it is legitimate for most families to hire private tutors to suit "their needs".

A number of studies have attempted to identify the factors that sustain the behind-the-scenes private tuition system in Kenya and elsewhere. Davies and Aurini (2006) observe that in order to understand the reasons for the existence of private tutoring, it is useful to look at both the consumers and the producers. The consumers include the parents as well as the pupils. They point out that many families invest in private tutoring as part of "intensive parenting". This style of parenting emphasizes a careful plan of structured activities for children; in which tutoring is part of a series of extra lessons that also include music, dance, and sports.

Wanyama and Njeru (2004), in the context of Kenya, observe that the prevalence of private tuition has more to do with the emphasis on examination as a basis for staff recruitment and promotion. Still, at higher levels of education, many parents may feel incompetent to help their children as per the curriculum content. In addition; parents' employment and other personal commitments leave them with little time to spend in assisting their children with assignments. Mboi and Nyambetha (2013) contend that decisions to conduct private tuition in schools are made during Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings were pupils are not allowed to participate.

The practice of private tuition in Kenya has been the cause of disharmony between the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) and the Kenyan parents. When issuing a ban on holiday tuition in 2012 the then Education Minister, felt that schools should be able to complete the syllabus and prepare students for national examinations within the given term periods (KSSHA, 2012). The statement caused mixed reactions among various stakeholders particularly parents. For example, parents felt that remedial teaching was necessary to complete the syllabus due to the overloaded curriculum and also to bring on board slow learners in order to help them compete with fast learners for the limited university slots. These reactions indicate a conflict of interest between the MOE and parents which needs to be addressed. It is against this background that this study sought to establish the perceptions of parents on the practice of private tuition in public learning institutions in Kenya, since they are the key stakeholders in the education process.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to establish the perceptions of parents on the practice of private tuition in public learning institutions in Kenya. Premised on this purpose, the study aimed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. To determine the reasons for support towards private tuition as perceived by parents
- ii. To establish gender differences on the perception towards private tuition among parents.
- iii. To find out if the views of parents whose children participate in private tuition differed from the views of those whose children do not.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What are the perceived reasons for supporting private tuition among parents
- ii. Are there gender differences in perception towards private tuition among parents?

iii. What are the differences in perception towards private tuition between parents whose children participate in private tuition and those whose children do not?

HYPOTHESES

This study was guided by the following hypotheses which were tested at the .05 level of significance:

[Ho₁] There is no statistically significant difference between the parents' gender and perception on private tuition.

[Ho₂] There is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of parents whose children participate in private tuition and those who do not.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design. The researchers employed this design to investigate the perceptions of parents toward extra tuition in public secondary schools in Kenya. The target population included parents' in public secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. Simple random sampling was used in this study by selecting 10 schools out of the 40 public secondary schools. From each school 4 parents from the Parents Teachers' Associations (PTA) were purposively selected to participate in the study. Structured questionnaires of the Likert type of scale were used to collect data. The response categories had score ranges between 1 and 5 wherein a score of 1 represented strongly agree, 2- agree, 3- undecided, 4- disagree, and 5- strongly disagree. These score ranges were further transformed into interval scale in order to determine perceptions. The overall perception score ranges were dichotomously interpreted thus: 1.0-2.5, represented a positive perception while score ranges 2.6-5.0 represented negative perception. On the basis of this scale transformation, data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and organize data and to describe parents' perceptions using the mean and standard deviation. The SPSS programme version 20, was used to run the analysis. All the null hypotheses that were formulated in line with the objectives were tested using the t-test for independence of means at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Perceptions of Parents on Private Tuition

The first objective sought to determine the reasons for practice of private tuition as perceived by parents.

A descriptive analysis of the findings is summarized in Table 1

Table 1: Parents perceptions on reasons for the practice of private tuition

| Reasons for private tuition by parents (N=40) | Mean | S.D |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| private tuition will improve my child's mean grade | 1.55 | .677 |
| private tuition improves overall school performance | 1.80 | .883 |
| private tuition helps to increase knowledge in various subjects | 1.78 | .862 |
| private tuition helps in syllabus coverage | 1.60 | 1.008 |
| private tuition helps weak students to improve in academic performance | 1.65 | .736 |
| private tuition leads to more learning experience | 1.98 | 1.143 |
| private tuition provide time for inter class discussion | 2.13 | 1.223 |
| private tuition helps students focus on weak subjects | 1.83 | .931 |
| private tuition improves teacher student relationship | 2.28 | 1.219 |
| private tuition allows enough time to revise for exams | 1.80 | 1.043 |
| private tuition helps students to compete effectively in KCSE examination | 2.13 | 1.202 |
| private tuition helps teachers to identify needs of individual learners | 2.00 | 1.177 |
| private tuition helps students to build confidence to face national exams | 2.17 | 1.259 |
| private tuition allows teachers to have adequate time to respond to challenging questions | 2.05 | 1.218 |
| private tuition helps schools to compete effectively in academic performance with other schools | 2.23 | 1.165 |
| private tuition creates disparities among learners especially if some learners are not able to afford extra tuition | 2.22 | 1.330 |
| private tuition increases academic pressure on the learners | 2.93 | 1.421 |
| private tuition leads to good academic results which helps to build teachers reputation to the public | 2.85 | 1.388 |
| private tuition helps learners engage in constructive academic activity during free time | 2.05 | 1.037 |
| private tuition is a source of income for teachers | 3.30 | 1.682 |
| private tuition should be made compulsory in all schools | 3.22 | 1.349 |
| private tuition should be scrapped altogether in schools | 3.70 | 1.305 |
| Overall perception Index | 2.24 | .555 |

Based on the interpretation schema presented in the methodology section, it can be observed from Table 1 that the overall perception for the parents towards private tuition was favorable ($\bar{X} = 2.24$, $n = 40$). A critical look at the Table 1 items shows that most parents were in agreement that private tuition was beneficial mostly for academic reasons such as improving child's mean grade ($\bar{X} = 1.55$), increasing knowledge in various subjects ($\bar{X} = 1.78$), helping in syllabus coverage ($\bar{X} = 1.60$), and helping weak students to improve in academic performance ($\bar{X} = 1.65$) among other reasons. Parents however seemed to be non-committal as to whether private tuition was a source of income for teachers ($\bar{X} = 3.30$). They were also undecided as to whether private tuition should be made compulsory ($\bar{X} = 3.22$) in all schools or be scrapped altogether ($\bar{X} = 3.70$). This finding seems to suggest that parents were concerned mostly about the academic performance of their children as the single most factor that influenced their support for private tuition. This therefore implies that for as long as the society pegs academic success on the academic grades, private tuition gains credence among parents and this trend will remain into the foreseeable future. The findings of this study were supported by Davies and Aurini (2006) who noted that hiring of private tutors in Canada was part of a wider strategy in which parents place a great premium on education.

Gender differences on the perception towards private tuition among parents

The second objective sought to establish the gender differences among parents on the perception towards the practice of private tuition. In order to achieve this objective the first null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant difference between the parents' gender and perception on private tuition was formulated. The hypothesis presumed that perceptions of the parents towards private tuition and their gender were independent at least statistically. In order to prove the validity of this claim, a t-test for independence of means was conducted and the summary of the findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3

Table 2: Parents' mean perception scores on private tuition by gender

| | parent's gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----|----------|----------------|
| mean perception score index | Male | 16 | 2.321023 | .6353821 |
| | Female | 24 | 2.181818 | .5017039 |

Table 2 shows that there were 16 male parents and 24 female parents who were sampled. The respective mean perception for males was 2.32 while that for female parents was 2.18. It is worth noting that female perceptions did not vary widely as compared to those of males in the study sample. This implies that all factors constant, female perceptions ($SD = .50$) were more reliable than those of males ($SD = .64$).

To test whether the mean differences in terms of gender were statistically significant, a t-test for independence of means was run at the .05 level of significance and the summary of the findings is presented in Table 3

Table 3: Perceptions by gender (t-test for independence of means)

| | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----------------|
| | T | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| perception on private tuition | .773 | 38 | .445 |

Table 3 shows that the mean perceptions among the parents were not statistically and significantly different, $t (38) = .773$; $p = .445$. This implies that the gender of a parent did not significantly influence perceptions towards private tuition. Therefore it could be inferred that the perceptions of male and female parents were similar in all respects and on this basis the null hypothesis was accepted. Based on this finding, it was concluded that gender and parents perceptions towards the practice of private tuition were statistically independent. Thus the favorable attitude held by the parents was similar across gender divide.

Comparative view of parents whose children participate in private tuition and of those whose children do not

The third objective sought to find out if the views of parents whose children participated in private tuition differed from the views of those whose children did not. In order to address this objective the second null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of parents whose children participated in private tuition and those who did not was formulated. A summary of the analysis in view of this objective is presented in Tables 4 and 5

Table 4: Perceptions of parents whose children participate in private tuition and those who do not

| | Does your son or daughter participate in private tuition | N | Mean | S.D |
|-----------------------------|--|----|------|------|
| Mean perception score index | No | 5 | 2.06 | .281 |
| | Yes | 35 | 2.26 | .583 |

From Table 4, it can be observed that 35 (87%) of the parents affirmed that their children participated in private tuition as opposed to 5 (13%) who responded in the negative to the question that was posed: does your son or daughter participate in private tuition? Table 4 also shows that the two groups of parents expressed a favorable perception towards the practice of private tuition although the mean perceptions between the two categories of respondents differed marginally with the “NO” group recording a mean index of 2.06 while the “YES” group had a mean index of 2.26. A closer examination on the spread of the scores indicates that the variability index of the “YES” group was high ($SD = .58$) while that of the “NO” group was low ($SD = .28$). This implies that the responses among the “No” group were very much closer to the mean than were the “Yes” type of responses and hence were judged to be highly dependable.

In order to test if the differences between the “NO” group and the “YES” group were statistically and significantly different, a t- test for independence of means was performed and the results are presented in Table 5

Table 5 Independent Samples Test between the Yes and No group of parents

| | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-----------------------------|-------|----|-----------------|
| mean perception score index | -.744 | 38 | .461 |

From Table 5, it can be observed that the perceptions between parents whose children participated in private tuition (Yes group) and those whose children did not participate (No Group) did not statistically differ significantly; $t(38) = -.744$; $p = .461$. Therefore the views of parents whose children participated in private tuition and those who did not were favorable and similar in all respects. On the basis of this finding, the second null hypothesis was accepted and conclusion made that the two groups’ perceptions about private tuition were statistically independent.

Perceptions of parents who think private tuition can improve performance of the child

Finally the fourth objective sought to determine the perceptions of parents with regard to performance improvement. In line with the general reasons for supporting private tuition as shown in Table 1, the study found that majority of parents held the view that private tuition improves performance of the child (mean= 2.21; $n=39$) as shown in Table 6. Only one parent held a contrary view that private tuition does not necessarily improve the performance.

Table 6: Whether private tuition improves academic performance

| | In your own opinion does private tuition improve academic performance of your child? | N | Mean | S.D |
|-----------------------------|---|----|------|------|
| Mean perception score index | No | 1 | 3.41 | . |
| | Yes | 39 | 2.21 | .529 |

In order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the Perceptions of parents who think private tuition can improve performance of the child and those who do not, the third null hypothesis which stated that there was no statistically significant difference between parents who view that private tuition improves performance and those who do not, was formulated. A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 7

Table 7: perception of parents and performance (t-test for independence of means)

| | t-test for Equality of Means | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----------------|--------------------|
| | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference |
| mean perception score index | 2.244 | 38 | .031 | 1.2016317 |

Table 7 shows that when the mean difference was subjected to the t-test for independence of means, the t-test results showed that perceptions between parents who viewed private tuition as leading to improved academic performance and those who did not were statistically and significantly different; $t(38)=2.24$; $p=.031$. On the basis of this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected and conclusion made that the views of parents in support of the preposition that private tuition improves academic performance and those against the proposition were independent. This may therefore imply that some parents were favoring private tuition not necessarily because of its influence on academic improvement but for other reasons as well. The most probable explanation to this finding could be that the parents supported private tuition because they did not want to be disturbed at

home by their children. Hence, tuition provided a better avenue of avoiding the nuisance caused by the children at home. This observation is in line with Davies and Aurini (2006) who observed that many families invest in private tutoring as part of “intensive parenting” in which case children are presented with a lot of structured activities besides academics such as music and dance.

CONCLUSION

The practice of private tuition is a controversial issue as most stakeholders in the field of education hold different views as to whether it should be practiced or not. Parents, teachers, students, and government are normally at cross purposes when the issue is raised in education discourses. In this study, it was established that Kenyan parents view the practice of private tuition favorably contrary to the government view which has outlawed the practice in schools. Regardless of their gender, parents were found to support the practice mainly because of academic reasons such as covering the syllabus and improving in academic grades of the learners. This finding was found to be consistent with the observation by Wanyama and Njeru (2004), who noted that private tuition was more prevalent due to the emphasis placed on grades in national examinations. It is therefore clear that as long as examination grades play a greater role in furtherance of career and higher studies, a lot of premium will be placed on examination performance and this is a requisite for the continued support of private tuition among key education stakeholders in Kenya and elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION

Since parents are in support of private tuition owing to the high premium attached to academic grades and the importance these grades play to the social mobility of a candidate, the study recommends that:

- i. Government of Kenya should not outlaw the practice, instead, the practice should be not only encouraged and harmonized; and possibly taxed as is the practice in Israel and Australia in which case private tuition contributes to the revenues of these countries.
- ii. If the practice has to be outlawed altogether, the Government has to overhaul the entire structure of education that places high premiums on examination grades. If an alternative form of evaluation is adopted, then the dependency syndrome towards education among stakeholders will reduce and hence the practice will naturally cease.
- iii. Since some parents seem to favor private tuition for other reasons other than for academic purposes particularly as a way of intensive parenting, there is need to organize for counseling sessions for these parents so as to advise them on the need to bond with their children and to take responsibility.

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